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AUTHOR Kelly, Noeline; Kelly, Brian
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ABSTRACT

The biographical and educational backgrounds, the teaching careers, and classroom performances of nine professors who had won teaching awards were studied, based on interviews and classroom observation. Five of the professors were male, four were female, and they ranged in age from the early forties to late sixties. Six had doctorates and three had masters degrees. Common background elements noted were nonaffluent families, strong academic preparation, and motivation to seek a teaching career through an inspiring teacher. Common classroom performance elements were an enjoyment of teaching, an enthusiasm for the subject, excellent command of the language and delivery, the injection of humor, and the comparison of teaching to a theatrical performance. All subjects made an earnest attempt to make their students learn and tried to actively involve them through questions and discussions. Little use was made of notes or the lecture method. The teachers were divided on the necessity for them to conduct research and to publish. They questioned the priority given to research/publishing over teacher excellence in salary and promotion considerations. Attention is also directed to the way these professors would have been rated for merit salary increases at their university. (Author/SW)

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A B S T R A C T

TITLE: BACKGROUNDS, EDUCATION, AND TEACHING STYLES OF TEACHING AWARD WINNING UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

Much research has been conducted in efforts to identify what elements are present that distinguish a good or effective teacher from a poor or ineffective one. Focus has been on personality traits, teaching styles, student progress, classroom management techniques, and communications skills. Although the jury is still out on what makes one teacher more effective than another, awards continue to be made for teacher excellence; yet merit salary increments tend to view teaching effectiveness as secondary to scholarly writing.

The purpose of this study was to examine the biographical data, the educational backgrounds, the teaching careers and classroom performances of teaching award winning professors. The data were examined for common elements and dissimilarities. Nine university professors who had won a coveted teaching effectiveness award were interviewed and observed teaching.

Common background elements noted were non-affluent families, strong academic preparation, and motivation to seek a teaching career through an inspiring teacher.

Common classroom performance elements noted were an enjoyment of teaching, and enthusiasm for the subject, excellent command of the language and delivery; the injection of humor and the comparison of teaching to a theatrical performance. All subjects made an earnest attempt to make their students learn and tried to actively involve them through questions and discussions. Little use was made of notes or the lecture method.

The subjects were divided on the necessity for them to conduct research and to publish; they questioned the priority given to this over teacher excellence in salary and promotion considerations.

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AE 016 139

TITLE: BACKGROUNDS, EDUCATION AND TEACHING STYLES OF TEACHING AWARD WINNING PROFESSORS

AUTHORS: Dr. Noeline Kelly, Associate Professor
Department of Educational Administration and Supervision
College of Education
The University of Texas at El Paso

Dr. Brian Kelly, Chairman
Department of Health and Physical Education
College of Education
The University of Texas at El Paso

The purpose of this study was to examine the biographical data, the educational backgrounds, the professional lives and classroom performances of university professors who had won prestigious teaching effectiveness awards. The data were examined for commonalities and dissimilarities.

Nine out of the ten award winners in the last ten years constituted the subjects of this study. Five were male and four were female. All subjects were, or had been married. Two females were widowed or divorced. All of the subjects had children, now mostly grown up and away from home. The age range of the subjects was from early 40's to late 60's.

METHODOLOGY:

(a) Interviews:

The subjects were interviewed with a prepared set of questions covering biographical data, early education, professional preparation, and items specific to the winning of the award. Their opinions were sought on the qualities of an outstanding teacher, their teaching style, their relationship with students, their grading procedures, their writing and research.

(b) Classroom Visitation

All subjects were observed in the classroom one time. The visit was expected by unannounced.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Much research has been conducted in efforts to identify what elements are present that distinguish a good or effective teacher from a poor or ineffective one. In the 1920's, the focus was on personal characteristics. Students were asked such questions as what qualities they liked in their teachers? What were their good points? Who was their favorite teacher? These qualities were considered in evaluating teachers.

In the 1940's and 1950's, the focus was on the comparison of teaching methods. However, there was little agreement on which methods were more effective than others and the variation of teaching within a method could be as great as between methods. Also, in the 1950's, an attempt was made to evaluate teachers by describing classroom behaviors. The outcome was little more than that: descriptions.

In the late 1960's, the focus moved to evaluating teachers on student learning and student achievement. Hence, the emphasis on grade wide tests, standardized tests; the end products, not the process.

In the 1970's, the buzz phrases were "Direct Instruction," "Time on Task," "Back to Basics." In other words, look for the teacher who is back on the job actually teaching, and look for the effect on achievement tests. There is research that supports the effectiveness of direct instruction, and criticisers of the research conducted.

Now, in the 1980's, there is an emphasis on matching the learning style of a student to the teaching style of the teacher. This could prove a well-nigh impossible task, as students move from elementary to high school to university. Research has shown that teachers tend to teach in a manner that matches their learning style. If this is not compatible with their students' learning style, problems may occur.

Critics have pointed out that an evaluator may have a different teaching style from the teacher being evaluated and, therefore, grade him/her down. These same critics point out

that evaluators bring to the classroom their personal values, and if these differ from the teacher's, this can jaundice their view of the teacher's performance.

THIS STUDY:

Although the jury is still out on what makes one teacher more effective than another, awards continue to be made for teacher excellence. In this particular study, the teacher excellence winner received a $1,000 tax-free cash award. As shall be noted later, this monetary rewarding for teacher excellence, in most instances, did not carry over to the university's merit salary system.

BACKGROUND OF SUBJECTS:

All of the subjects came from non-affluent families, ranging from the dirt poor to "genteel poverty." Most were from rural areas and had attended small elementary schools and far from large high schools. Three subjects were reared and educated in other countries: namely, Great Britain, Canada, and New Zealand. They all had strong academic backgrounds, although fewer than half had received any teacher training.

Six of the subjects had Doctorates and three had Masters degrees. All had won other awards for teaching, research, scholarship, sports or service. The disciplines they represented were: History (3), English (2), Linguistics (1), Health and Physical Education (1), Biology (1), Speech and Drama (1). In most instances, at some stage in their education, the participants had been influenced by a favorite or inspiring teacher to pursue a career in teaching in the subject area of that teacher.

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF AN OUTSTANDING TEACHER?

To this question, the professors gave almost textbook answers; yet, it is hard for the interviewer to believe that they were familiar with the demonstrable attributes related to effective teaching by experts on the subject. Most frequently mentioned were: enthusiasm for teaching, the students, and

the subject matter. The teacher must like the students, have a commitment to them, have respect for them, be demanding of them, and have an interest in their achievement. The teacher must be well-organized and know the subject matter; have stamina and vitality; maintain a sense of humor. Direct quotes included: "I enjoy teaching. Getting paid is a bonus." "It's fun to teach. Bad moods disappear." "I can start sick and end well." "I begin exhausted, then teach with vitality, then leave exhausted."

TEACHING STYLES:

The teaching styles of the professors varied with the subject matter, the class size, and the objectives of the teacher. Only two professors used the straight lecture/note taking style. One of these was to a large class, with no notes used and questions not encouraged. The other was to a small class with student participation encouraged. One professor with a very large class used intensive direct instruction with much questioning and encouraging of note taking. Three professors used seminars, and two used laboratory/participation. All professors were very knowledgeable of their subject and were well-organized. They appeared to be concerned with their students' progress and reminded them of what was expected (e.g., upcoming tests, assignments due). All, except one professor with the large class, had good rapport with the students. Only one became short-tempered at a student's complaint about some difficulty. Five out of the nine professors maintained a low-key approach to their teaching; three could be described as physically energetic. All, except one professor, exhibited enthusiasm for what they were teaching; and a majority used humor in their presentations. All, except two professors, encouraged participation of the students in the form of discussions, answering questions, demonstrating, reading aloud and critiquing. Half of the professors compared teaching to going on stage for a performance, and felt that one had to be "up" for it; feel a great anticipation." A majority mentioned that, even after years of teaching, they were nervous or uptight before a class.

The professors were evenly divided on failing students. Those who did not fail any students, felt they themselves had failed if their students did not pass the course. Those who failed students cited disinterested students not prepared to put the time in, or take advantage of the help available. Most professors were now using more handouts and study guides. The older faculty felt they had simplified their course for today's students.

A majority of the professors were actively engaged in writing and research (although not necessarily scholarly research as recognized by the University administration). They admitted to a shortage of time and energy to devote to both teaching and writing and were divided on the weight given to scholarly writing in promotion and merit salary ratings.

In the State of Texas, the Regent's Rules classify the duties of university professors under three headings:

1. Teaching
2. Scholarly activities
3. Service

In this particular university, a merit system for salary increments has been introduced to rate professors on the above duties. The categories are:

1. EXCEPTIONAL

   This category implies extraordinary performance in all three evaluative areas of teaching, scholarship, and university/community service.

2. EXCELLENT

   This category implies high-level of achievement in all three areas or extraordinary performance in teaching and scholarship and an adequate record of service.

3. VERY GOOD

   This category implies above-average performance in all three areas or extraordinary performance in either

teaching or scholarship and an adequate record in the other two areas.

4. GOOD

This category implies above-average performance in two of the three areas.

5. NON-MERIT

This category implies performance which does not fit into any of the above categories.

The professors participating in this study were ranked for merit salary increases as follows:

MERIT SALARY CATEGORIES		NUMBER OF PROFESSORS
Category I	(Exceptional)	1
Category II	(Excellent)	2
Category III	(Very Good)	1
Category IV	(Good)	4
Category V	(Non-Merit)	0

(NOTE): One professor retired before the merit system was introduced.

Is it any wonder that a majority of these master teachers questioned the priority given to research over teacher excellence in merit salary considerations?

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